

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 21, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Consolidated Appropriations bill for FY2008 included \$2.57 billion in funding for the Low Income Housing and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), including \$586 million in contingency funds to be released at your discretion. We are writing to urge you to release the LIHEAP funds immediately. The high energy prices facing consumers and the severe weather of the past few weeks warrant this release.

This winter, the Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimates that households can expect to pay between 10 to 22 percent more for heating fuels than during the 2006-2007 winter, and many of these families are carrying energy debt from previous years. As such, states need additional funding immediately to reduce the energy burden on families, individuals with disabilities, and senior citizens to ensure their health and safety through the cold winter months.

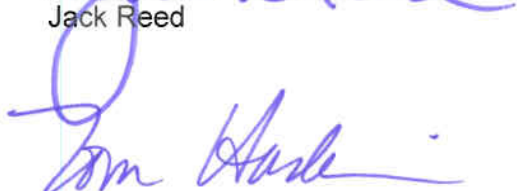
Between FY2003 and FY2007 the number of households receiving LIHEAP assistance increased by 26 percent from 4.6 million to about 5.8 million or about 15.6 percent of the eligible population. During this same period, the federal appropriation increased by only 10 percent with the resulting average grant declining from \$349 to \$305. Unfortunately, energy prices are not decreasing proportionally, but instead continue to rise. Home heating prices are projected by the EIA to reach almost \$1,000 this year for the typical family, an increase of almost 80 percent higher than the average cost of home heating during the winter of 2001-02. As a result, there has been a significant decrease in the program's purchasing power. According to the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, states are planning to reduce the number of households served by about 15 percent in the absence of additional federal and supplemental state funding. The result would be a decline in the number of households served from about 5.8 million in FY2007 to 4.9 million.

LIHEAP is vital to protecting the public health and safety of low-income families. According to the Children's Sentinel Nutrition Assessment Program (C-SNAP) out of Boston Medical Center, babies and toddlers who live in energy insecure households are more likely to suffer poor health, require hospitalization, manifest developmental problems, and lack adequate food. C-SNAP found that when families do not have access to sufficient energy, they may resort to unsafe heating methods and do not have the proper means to refrigerate or prepare food for their children. In addition, without a sufficient LIHEAP benefit, seniors living on fixed incomes often have to decide between buying life-saving prescriptions and paying utility bills. For individuals and households that may have to face these difficult choices, LIHEAP makes a real difference in their ability to cope with adverse circumstances.

We request that your Administration release the \$586 million in FY2008 LIHEAP contingency funds that were recently approved by Congress to help low-income seniors and families with their home energy expenses during a winter that has already seen a significant share of severe winter weather and cold conditions and promises only to get colder.

Sincerely,


Jack Reed


Tom Harkin



Robert P. Casey, Jr.


Olympia J. Snowe


Norm Coleman


Lisa Murkowski



Barbara A. Mikulski



Susan M. Collins


Arlen Specter

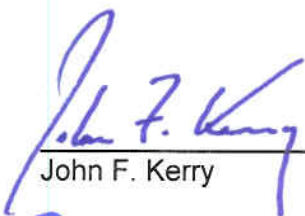

Hillary Rodham Clinton

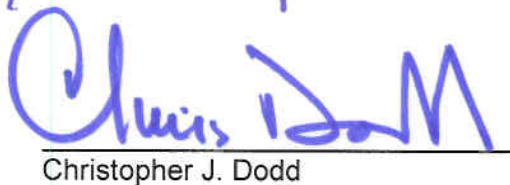

Bernard Sanders

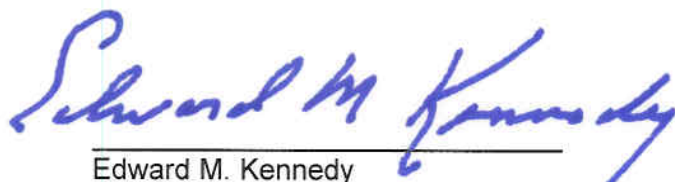

Joseph R. Biden


Herb Kohl


Ron Wyden


John F. Kerry


Christopher J. Dodd


Edward M. Kennedy

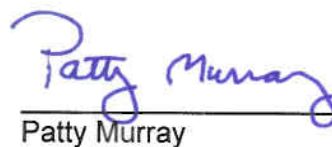

Max Baucus


John D. Rockefeller IV


Debbie Stabenow

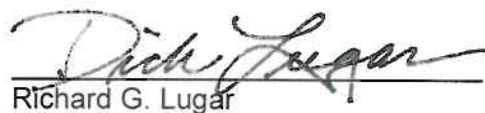

Sherrod Brown


Maria Cantwell


Patty Murray


Sheldon Whitehouse


Barack Obama


Richard G. Lugar


Ken Salazar


Frank R. Lautenberg


Joseph I. Lieberman

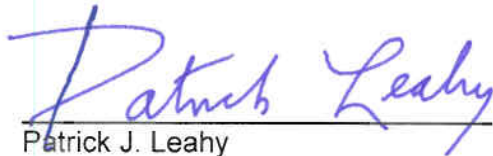

Mary L. Landrieu



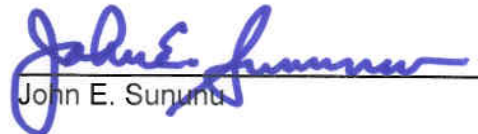
Carl Levin



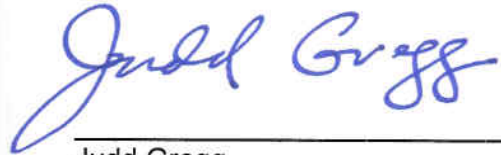
Richard J. Durbin



Patrick J. Leahy



John E. Sununu



Judd Gregg



Jeff Bingaman